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TLS Commentary

Grimm for grown-ups

In most of the arts, sophistication sets in soon after the establishment of a reputation of well-known works. The Greek myths and even the Greek classics got the full treatment of comment, adaptation and send-up from the Alexandrians, and Ovid stitched together his most famous work, *The Metamorphoses*, by collecting sophisticated variants of the adventures of the gods in pursuit of mortal love. Today, the situation is so complex that almost every story which has been handed down to us has been tampered with, and it is difficult to find a version which is not a mixture of the original and the modern. You could find a library with the many works of art devoted to the legend of Orpheus. Ours is a truly luminous consciousness. Every degree of fidelity is possible in such translations—from pedantic accuracy to wholesale anachronism. However, it is a mistake to think that sophistication is the same as complication. One meaning of the dubious word "camp" when applied to style, may be the avoidance of feeling. Some elaborate embroideries, wild exaggerations and heavy-lidded ironies may be no more than a measure of the writer's fear of the underlying emotion of the story, to which he is none the less attracted.

When it comes to the Folk or Fairy Tales (Märchen) of the Brothers Grimm, the picture is particularly hard to crack, since it was set in a childhood in dozens of books with a great variety of illustrations. Though not collected until the early years of the nineteenth century, the tales themselves reach back into the deep past of European culture. Andersen ranked the German Märchen with the Bible as the two most important collections of writings in western Europe. The fairy tale, incidentally, is the only literary form in which English is relatively deficient: the stories we have all known since infancy originate in Germany, France and the Scandinavian countries. Once they were collected by the Grimms, these famous tales began to be used in works of greater sophistication—in apurified, belated, and films. The real-life kitchen of King Ludwig's Nenschwaben, rustic, combined with a dose of Victorian fairy tale illustration, even made the fortune of that Middle West entrepreneur, Walt Disney. What they could be more layered with sophistication than a chamber opera, *Transformations*, based on Anno Sexton's updating of Grimm for graduates of psychoanalysis in the 1970s.

The composer, Conrad Susa, took kind of the best-known stories in Miss Sexton's volume of the same name, including "Rapunzel", "Hansel and Gretel", and "The Sleeping Beauty", and set them for eight voices, accompanied by a small ensemble of wind, brass, percussion, and strings. Miss Sexton, perhaps each tale with a modern application of its moral, so that her "Sleeping Beauty" asks us to conceive of a backward child, and "Rapunzel" begins with a sort of folk & dance between an old woman and a young girl. Both the opera and this book of poems invoke

the old German story collectors: "Attention, my dear, let me present to you this boy. He is sixteen and he wants some answers. . . He turns the key. Presto! It opens this book of odd tales which transform the Brothers Grimm/Transform? As if an enlarged paper clip/could be a piece of sculpture. (And it could). The paper clip is present, since the staging is both bare and resourceful, and makes use of various sorts of everyday prop. The singers, male and female, set as a kind of chorus or pool of voices, from which from time to time individuals emerge to personify the characters in the story. There is no operatic artifice in the conventional sense, and the action is sometimes entirely tangential to the plot. During "Rapunzel", the male singers enter the auditorium in their bathers, wiping water from their heads and shoulders with towels, and in the witch's cottage are conducted round a barbecue grill. Other intimate exchanges are carried on while

three of the singers knock a shuttlecock to each other across a hand-mirror net. There is a trill of drinks from which they help themselves plentifully. All of this could be much more tiresome than, in fact, it is, and I doubt that many of the audience at the Young Vic last week when the English Music Theatre gave three performances of *Transformations*, were in any doubt about what was going on. Miss Sexton's reasonably clear narrative line and the fine singing and excellent diction of the cast saw to that.

Not having looked at the score, I cannot say whether Roger Williams's direction and Bernard Cullshaw's designs are faithful to Mr Susa's intentions, but the musical presentation fitted the staging so exactly that I suspect that what we witnessed was what the composer meant. The music is difficult to describe. Once or twice the instrumental writing suggested the vitality of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat*, but mostly it relied on a modern continuo style—capable of

supporting the voices but hardly memorable in its own right. The vocal line was smooth even when the intervals were wide, but it came a little stiff in the big duet between the two women.

I cannot pick out any of the singers for special praise, as the group nature of the programme prevented me from identifying them. All performed with vigour, as did the orchestra under its conductor, Nicholas Kraemer. Despite the wanton irrelevance of much of its staging, *Transformations* was never boring and sometimes moving in its juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary images. Struggling again with the problem of levels of sophistication, I said myself, as I left the theatre, whether Conrad Susa or Engelbert Humperdinck had served the Brothers Grimm better. Both, I decided, were anachronistic, but Humperdinck wins on musical grounds.

Peter Porter



T. S. Eliot at the age of seventeen, Norman Maltzer at five, and Allen Ginsberg at seventeen. From *First Glance* (see below).



The infant muse

Tull Kupferberg and Sylvia Topp have had the enjoyable notion of making an anthology of juvenile literature. *First Glance: The Childhood Creations of the Famous* (New York: Doubleday, \$7.95) which provides in several flavours the improper pleasures that come from knowing something that the writer didn't. A job of "appreciation" from a ten-year-old. Please consider me for the position of office boy. . . I will accept any pay offered. . . or an adolescent's resolutions concerning purity are not too far-reaching in themselves; but we know that the authors will become respectable President Nixon god-father John XXIII. (It only the Los Angeles Times had hired Richard M. he might now be a fearless investigative journalist.)

The contributors range alphabetically from Sholem Aleichem's A to Z Henry of the abuse his stepmother poured on him (which, when he came to think of it, must have been a very large abuse), by the way, to Edmund Spenser's "Viviana is a very beautiful city but there is not much to see there". They range chronologically from five-year-old Mozart to twenty-two-year-old William Randolph Hearst, and along come other axis from Duke Ellington's Soda, Potomac Rag to Adolf Hitler's architectural sketches.

Logically one should not expect too much: either the writer is already talented, in which case what we see is merely "preliterate work" (Gore Vidal's worst story at seventeen, *Aliso Durol*, or the story *Der Wer* at eight); or he is not, in which case we get either ineptitude or more often mimesis. Look where we will, and in what over land/Europe's rich soil or Africa's barren sand, we find Cullen Bryant at seven, William Keats at eight, Hemingway at ten, and the novel along the way, and the end of it empty.

three of the singers knock a shuttlecock to each other across a hand-mirror net. There is a trill of drinks from which they help themselves plentifully. All of this could be much more tiresome than, in fact, it is, and I doubt that many of the audience at the Young Vic last week when the English Music Theatre gave three performances of *Transformations*, were in any doubt about what was going on. Miss Sexton's reasonably clear narrative line and the fine singing and excellent diction of the cast saw to that.

Children's writings will be most interesting when they are neither immature nor premature, but loyal imitations of the adult world—possessing a special, adaptive character, not present in the adult form. And such children, by and large, will not be the famous. What, if anything, would have been the Marjory Fleming, "Pot Scott, if meesles had not carried her off at eight?"

We have Stephen Foster's *Topsy*, Waltz, Fernald on comic sections, Robert Crumb's family scenes, and Newton's conjuring tricks. There are samples of the urge to found newspapers: *I. P. Stone* wrote and edited *Project* at fourteen, and Robert Southey, *The Flagellant*. (Both press boys in trouble.)

The volume is lightly illustrated with biographical accounts of the childhood of Dick Cavett and John Gandhi (he played *Demetrius* in *Julius Caesar*), and a longish short story by Tull Kupferberg. (These hardly compensate for the absence of any of the great names of children's literature, from Lewis Carroll to J. R. R. Tolkien, from *Winnie the Pooh* to *The Hobbit*.)

More frequently the style is supercharged, as in Shelley's *Zastrozzi* or Karl Marx's amazing fragment of verse drama *Outenam* ("I shall howl gigantic curses on mankind. . ."). Or over-poweredly wistful, like young Ben Franklin or Sig Freud. But Allen Ginsberg, at seventeen, has a rather unexpected facility: "Reflected in a whiskey glass, Fate's yellow eyes were molten brass. Equally unproven, is Orwell's *Jingolism* of England? Oh you young men of valour, for Valley Forge Military Academy from P. D. Salinger. But it is no surprise that Anne Austen was good at satire ("The Calves and Cruelities of Henry VIII are no numerous to be mentioned, and nothing can be said of his

entire, but that his abolishing Rellous House and leaving them to the ruinous depredations of time has been of infinite use to the landscape of England in general"). That Robert Fichter was good at rhymes ("Kiss, P-R, R-R, R-R"), or that Maltzer was good at rhymes ("Kiss, P-R, R-R, R-R"), or that Maltzer was good at rhymes ("Kiss, P-R, R-R, R-R").

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Printing & Book Production

Present and correct

By Hugh Williamson

Anybody who writes about the making of books encounters problems of terminology. The word "folio", for example, means a sheet of typescript, or a page size, or a page number, according to context. The context of a term or of an opinion is sometimes more enlightening than a definition. When I say about printers here is based on my own experience only, in a printing company which specialises in academic books and journals at the postgraduate level. I doubt whether the general reader is particularly interested in work of this kind; but he might learn something about the printing of books, from the textual customs and ethics of a reasonably conscientious and skilful printer.

Within my own firm, different kinds of typescript (which is itself only one kind of "copy" for typographic composition) undergo different kinds of treatment. Even within a single text, different passages may be differently handled. For example, any extract from a document or publication is set almost exactly in accordance with the copy, even including spelling mistakes and obvious omissions. I remember long ago that a reviewer asked a book about Nelson on the grounds that every single quotation was wrong. I wondered at the time whether the author had been careless, or whether the printer had chosen to modernize the spelling of Nelson and his captains.

When a writer's copy goes to the printer for composition in type, the writer cannot know what that printer's methods are in general, or what kind of attention his own copy will attract in particular. He should have little to fear. The writer's meaning, and his general way of expressing it, are intended by any decent printer to be represented in the edition. But it is part of the nature of the printed book that any edition is certain to differ

in various details from the author's possible original copy, doubtless as amended by the publisher. Quintilian asked his publisher or typesetter to see that his words were issued correctly. I doubt whether this accuracy and correctness can have lowered the kind of detail printers worry about today.

More likely it was a matter of leaving out words or even whole passages, or copying them during dictation by a copy-master to the scribes. There was next to no punctuation to get wrong, and Latin spelling seems even then to have been more thoroughly standardized than that of English is today. But we still see that the publishers who produced the manuscript editions were not always accurate and correct in their work.

There was not much the author could do about it. He had no rights over the publication of his work, he received no royalties, and there was no such thing as copyright. He could ask for good versions of his text to be published, but he could not restrain bad versions. In imperial times the manuscript editions were written by trained

slaves, in the Dark Ages by monks; so there were no arguments about pay, little facility for author's alterations, and probably next in an supervision of textual presentation. Accuracy must have been very much a matter of conscience. Not all consequences are strict: Hornebuch in his *Practica* for those who are to correct *Printed Books*, published in 1608, wrote that "nothing else those days is of such concern to the school of errors as the textual discrepancies in manuscript books, and the thousands of mistakes and lacunae, which they find left there by the fault of the transcribers".

The early printers had reason and opportunity to do better. To print an edition has always been a matter of major expenditure, and obtaining a sound manuscript of some classic work, as printer's copy, might as well be included in the costs. Scholarship could be called on to stand beside the press, perhaps through the printer's association with church or university or author, perhaps by the employment of a corrector of the

press. The single movable type lent itself to correction or alteration after setting, and its relief surface lent itself to proofs which can be read outside the printing house. Mistakes in an anonymous manuscript may do no harm to the scribe; mistakes in hundreds of books, each with the printer's imprint at the end at on the title-page, might be a commercial disaster.

A corrector of the press such as Hornebuch was rather more than a printing craftsman. His education was required to match that of the author and reader rather than that of the printer.

We have several accounts of the work of the corrector in early days. It is one of the rewards of book production practice to find how much historic information and material exist, to tell us how our work has been done in past centuries. And it is one of the penalties of business pressures today that we have a little time to study it all. I spend my working life within walking distance of a whole world of primary sources, and I have never even applied for a reader's ticket for the Bodleian Library. I have to rely on books I can afford to buy, and on those I have the opportunity and time to review.

But I have a reprint of Hornebuch's manual, and from a distance of three and a half centuries he tells us much about the attitudes of the trained corrector of the press, John Smith, in *The Printer's Grammar* of 1755, goes into greater detail about what a corrector was expected to do. The difference between a corrector and a proof-reader was that the corrector worked on the copy. He was to start the composition off on the

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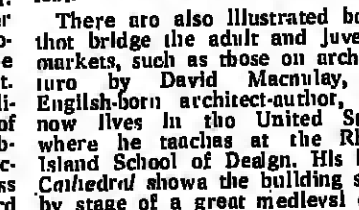
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